

Teaching the Possible: Justice-Oriented Professional Development for Progressive Educators

Mollie A. Gambone

Drexel University

Abstract

Providing justice-oriented professional development for progressive educators has historically been a site of tension. To address this, The Progressive Education Network (PEN), the leading professional organization of progressive educators in the United States, brought together over 800 educators for its 2015 National Conference, titled “Teaching the Possible: Access, Equity, and Activism!” This article documents PEN’s framework for facilitating an opportunity for educators to engage in dialogue about areas of social injustice throughout education and within their own schools. Findings derived from a discourse analysis of workshop abstracts published in the conference program suggest that the conference provided professional development in three areas: 1) workshops were designed by teachers to share useful methodologies relevant to the conference theme with other teachers; 2) workshops encouraged attendees to critically examine how problematic issues in education are commonly understood, then reframe them to consider the issues from different perspectives; 3) doing so gave rise to an understanding that in order to imagine innovative solutions to systemic problems, one must first be able understand how different groups of individuals experience the problems. This analysis establishes that by aligning the conference with a critical, justice-oriented theme, the workshops were designed to provide attendees with opportunities to investigate their own roles in producing, changing, and interpreting socially-just learning and teaching in their own school contexts. This is important because it advances the study of equitable access to progressive pedagogy, while at the same time utilizing Desimone’s (2009) framework for judging effective professional development for teachers.

Key words: Social justice curriculum, progressive education, education access, teacher professional development

Dr. Mollie Gambone graduated from the PhD in Educational Leadership Development Program at Drexel University with a special focus on progressive education, urban education, and teacher leadership. Currently, she is a research associate on a federally funded grant to support cradle-to-career opportunities for children living in the West Philadelphia Promise Zone.

Email: mad432@drexel.edu

Historically, encouraging young people to analyze, critique, and work to fix enduring issues of social injustice has been one of the most compelling and contested aspirations underpinning progressive education (Bruce & Eryaman, 2015; Counts, 1932; Cremin, 1961; Dewey, 1916/2008; Kliebard, 1995; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Currently in the United States, the effects of divisive political tension, the inequity inherent in standardized testing, and the rise of common curricula that fail to recognize the contextual differences between individual schools give renewed urgency to developing curricula that encourage teachers and students to think critically about meaningful ways to address inequity in both education and in society (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2012). One way of addressing this issue is through focused and effective teacher professional development.

The Progressive Education Network (PEN), the leading national professional organization that provides pedagogical guidance for K-12 progressive educators, endorses this need for training justice-oriented citizens. Through their biannual professional development conferences, the PEN executive council works not only to guide teachers to foster these values in their students, but also to critically examine and confront the injustices inherent in progressive pedagogy. To address historic issues of inequality, the theme of PEN's 2015 National Conference was *Teaching the Possible: Access, Equity, and Activism!* Over 800 progressive educators came together to share their experiences and engage in a dialogue to uncover areas of social injustice throughout the education system, and particularly within their own schools.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the social justice-oriented agenda of the workshops presented at the PEN 2015 National Conference. Drawing on the work of Westheimer and Kahne (2004), a justice-oriented curriculum will be generally defined as one that provides regular, intentional opportunities for students who “critically assess social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes; seek out and address areas of injustice; (and) know about democratic social movements and how to effect systemic change” (p. 240). This study aims to understand how professional development is designed as a site for progressive educators to engage with justice-oriented curricula. Findings indicate that in order for students to be engaged, democratic citizens, they must work alongside role model educators (Giroux & McLaren, 1986) who listen to and honor the truth in perspectives different than their own (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Findings derived from a discourse analysis of workshop abstracts published in the conference program suggest that the conference provided professional development in three areas: 1) workshops were designed by teachers to share useful methodologies relevant to the conference theme with other teachers; 2) workshops encouraged attendees to critically examine how problematic issues in education are commonly understood, then reframe them to consider the issues from different perspectives; 3) doing so gave rise to an understanding that in order to imagine innovative solutions to systemic problems, one must first be able understand how different groups of individuals experience the problems. This analysis establishes that through a meaningful attempt to align the conference with a critical, justice-oriented theme, the workshops were designed with the intent of providing attendees the opportunity to investigate their own roles in producing, reproducing, changing, negotiating and interpreting socially-just learning and teaching in their own school contexts.

Literature Review

Defining Progressive Education

Progressive education has historically been difficult to define, explain, study, and disseminate. In his history of the influence of the Progressive Era in the United States around the turn of the 20th century on education, Lawrence Cremin (1961) cautioned readers who were searching for a definition of progressive education that, “none exists, and none ever will, for throughout its history education meant different things to different people, and these differences were only compounded by the remarkable diversity of American education” (p. x). In another attempt to define it, progressive educator and scholar, Alfie Kohn (2008) reasoned that, “if progressive education doesn't lend itself to a single fixed definition, that seems fitting in light of its reputation for resisting conformity and standardization” (para. 1). Despite these difficulties in defining progressive education, one commonality that Read (2013) found through interviews with progressive educators was that regardless of other pedagogical beliefs, teachers who identify as progressive focus less on what to teach, and more on how to teach, and who they teach. Labaree (2005) explained progressive pedagogy capitalizes on the needs and interests of the students to teach transferrable skills through engagement in self-guided learning. Educators accomplish this by incorporating projects “that integrate the disciplines around socially relevant themes; and it means promoting value of community, cooperation, tolerance, justice and democratic equality” (Labaree, 2005, p. 277). Tom Little, a previous PEN president conducted an ethnographic study of 45 PEN member schools in order to define the commonalities of progressivism. He determined that, despite vast differences in contexts and student bodies, each of the schools “prepare(s) students for active participation in a democratic society, in the context of a child-centered environment, and with an enduring commitment to social justice” (Little & Ellison, 2015, p. 52). Because the current study focuses on the work of PEN schools and teachers, I have chosen to use Little and Ellison’s (2015) definition of progressive education as the basis of analysis.

Progressive Education as Justice-Oriented Pedagogy

The definitions for progressive education laid out above are all rooted in the philosophy that John Dewey formulated in his seminal work *Democracy and Education* (1916/2008). Dewey’s premise was that children’s education should serve as a base for growth and further learning both in and out of school throughout the course of their lives. To foster this experience, progressive administrators and teachers organize the school in such a way that they have time and space to examine the students’ interests and life experiences. Children’s interests then shape how teachers direct the classroom activities in order to give students an opportunity to learn through inquiry and experimentation. This process of hands-on, active learning encourages students to grow the habits of mind necessary to learn by locating their interests and exploring how they are connected to other areas of study. In this type of learning environment students not only learn an answer, but they achieve a deep understanding of problems and how their integral components are interrelated (Dewey, 1916/2008; Kliebard, 2005).

Viewing education as both separate parts and a connected whole does not only apply to academic learning; it is also the core of a justice-oriented curriculum (Westheimer & Kahne,

2004). This aim originates from Dewey's notion of *social reconstruction*, a pedagogical practice where students examine the world around them and work collectively to tackle systemic injustices. Through this process, students develop skills for "active citizenship, participation and strong democracy" (Bruce & Eryaman, 2015, p. 6). Encouraging students to become fluent in this kind of thought demands that progressive educators are adept at teaching a socially just curriculum. To do so, Giroux and McLaren (1986) clarified that teachers must actively "assume a pedagogical responsibility for attempting to understand the relationships and forces that influence their students outside of the immediate context of the classroom" (p. 236). One method for accomplishing this is for teachers to use culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) explained that this critical pedagogy is underpinned by three criteria: "a) Students must experience academic success; b) Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160).

Contested History of Progressive Education

Despite its attention to democratic learning and social justice, progressive education has been critiqued as an elite pedagogy since its inception (Counts, 1932; Cremin, 1961). The tenets of progressive education require that school administrators offer small class sizes so that teachers can get to know their students well, and that administrators grant teachers a significant degree of professional latitude and trust to design curriculum and lessons that foster individual student interest and aptitude. Because of these requirements, progressive pedagogy has historically existed mainly in private schools and has almost exclusively benefitted children from families who can afford it (Counts, 1932; Cremin, 1961; Labaree, 2005; Thinnes, 2015). This is problematic because the vast majority of students in the United States attend public schools. Furthermore, over half of public schoolchildren live within the boundaries of high-poverty school districts (Edbuild, 2016). High poverty districts have fewer resources, fewer highly qualified teachers, and often have higher crime, truancy, and dropout rates (Welner & Carter, 2013). Therefore, the persistence of progressive pedagogy in private schools renders it largely inaccessible to the majority of students in the U.S. who cannot afford access to it (Counts, 1932; Thinnes, 2015).

The pedagogical tension behind calling progressive ideals 'elite' hinges on the difficulty of balancing the aim of schooling to recognize and attend to the needs of individual students, while at the same time teaching students to be aware of how their needs both impact and are influenced by the needs of the larger community. Progressive pedagogy "placed the individual at the center of the stage, yet it perpetually criticized the competitive character of the present social order, indicating that it really rejected the philosophy of individualism" (Bowers, 1964, p. 175). This critique dates back to 1932 as two opposing camps of educational theorists were attempting to define progressive philosophy. One camp saw the primary aim of progressive pedagogy as tailoring education to the needs and interests of the individual child, while the other camp emphasized the importance of fostering socially just pedagogy (Bowers, 1964).

George Counts (1932) espoused the latter aim in his address to the Progressive Education Association, the leading coalition of progressive educators and theorists of the day (and forerunner to PEN). He admonished the inequitable practices of those present by urging progressive education to "emancipate itself from the influence of class... develop a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare, fashion a compelling and challenging vision of human destiny,

and become less frightened ... of imposition and indoctrination" (para. 8). Counts' opponents refuted that a comprehensive theory of social welfare (i.e., a standardized, justice-oriented curriculum) would require mandating a common curriculum and vision to progressive schools, thereby imposing external values that may not be meaningful to individual schools (Bruce & Eryaman, 2015). Such imposition was seen to be in direct opposition to the work schools do to develop contextually specific programming. Counts' critics argued that attempts to define a common approach to curricular design undermined the ability for schools to be responsive to the complex, ever changing needs of their stakeholders (Bruce & Eryaman, 2015).

Teacher Professional Development as a Means to Ameliorate Inequality

Because of the variety of experiences educators have in schooling before pursuing teaching as a profession, teacher learning is conceptualized as an "apprenticeship" (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Furthermore, in practice, teacher professional development is a "patchwork of opportunities - formal and informal, mandatory and voluntary, serendipitous and planned - stitched together into a fragmented and incoherent 'curriculum'" (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 174). Literature on teacher professional development calls for learning opportunities that attend to content matter, learning theories, curriculum development, pedagogy, and student learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999). However, due to external forces, it is nearly impossible to determine the effectiveness of discrete aspects of professional development on teachers' classroom practices (Desimone, 2009). One commonality among the literature on teacher learning is that teachers' own practice and classroom contexts are one of the most powerful sites of professional learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009). However this research is quick to point out that due to contextual variety among teachers and classrooms, it is not simply enough for a teacher to learn within the confines of his or her own classroom. Borko (2004) noted that successful teacher professional development programs have improved teachers' instructional practices and student learning through the use of items such as: "instructional plans and assignments, videotapes of lessons, and samples of student work" (p. 7). By studying these and other artifacts, teachers are able to grown their expertise beyond their own experiences.

As outlined above, determining a common framework for implementing justice-oriented curricula in multiple school contexts is not feasible, unless it can be made context specific. This task of adapting practices to meet the needs of individual schools, students, and teachers is not unique to progressive educators, though. It is the dilemma of all professional development for educators (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Education is seen largely as an individual profession where each teacher independently develops and designs learning material to meet the needs of his or her set group of students. Injecting a systematic approach to teaching and learning in such a siloed environment requires a nuanced understanding of what teachers know, what teachers believe, in what context they work, and who they teach (Wilson & Berne, 1999; Desimone, 2009).

Ball and Cohen (1999) suggest that effective professional development encourages teachers to operate on a fundamental foundation of trust and respect for the opinions and views of other teachers as well as students. The ability to value alternative perspectives creates an environment where teachers can analyze their own practice and "hold ideas and interpretations out for scrutiny, discussion, and debate in ways that are not seen as personal challenges to individuals" (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 27). Furthermore, Wilson and Berne (1999) recommend that professional development be designed with attention to teacher knowledge, which encompasses

knowledge of subject matter, knowledge of students, and knowledge of pedagogy. Specifically, they ask, “what categories of knowledge should good teachers possess?” (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 203). Little and Ellison’s (2015) ethnographic study of 45 progressive schools distilled the individual practices of the teachers at each school into a list of six tenets common to all progressive schools and educators. One of these tenets: “Support for children to develop a sense of social justice and become active participants in America’s democracy” (Little & Ellison, 2015, p. 52) is particularly relevant to understanding how issues of social justice are understood and acted upon by progressive educators. For that reason, I use it as evidence of the knowledge good progressive educators should possess.

Counts’ argument that progressive education is weak on its approach to justice-oriented curriculum has been an on-going site of self-reflective tension among progressive practitioners. To address this, the Progressive Education Network (PEN) encouraged its members to consider their role in educational inequity through the 2015 PEN national conference. Chris Thinnes (2015), a PEN board member, echoed Counts’ (1932) elitist critique in his blog post titled “Progressive Education has a Race Problem.” He argued that in order for progressive pedagogy to regain a place in mainstream educational policy, progressive educators must recognize and work to address the racial tensions inherent in the pedagogy. As Thinnes (2015) explained, “a progressive pedagogy that fails to be responsive to the voices of students, educators, families, or communities of color is not a pedagogy that should, or will, influence the trajectory of American education policy or practice in these times” (Para 1). He went on to outline how the 2015 PEN National Conference was designed to begin a frank conversation about ways PEN can support its member schools to do more to provide progressive education for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Thinnes (2015) reiterated Counts’ (1932) argument that progressive pedagogy, because it is mainly taught at private schools is, for the most part, delivered to a majority White, upper-class student body. Modern progressive educators are charged with the same difficult task as their predecessors: balancing the needs of the individual with the needs of the society. Doing so pushes progressive educators to question the inequity of offering progressive pedagogy only to students who have access to it (Thinnes, 2015). This critical examination of progressive pedagogy and practices drives the current study. Progressive education clearly has an orientation to social justice, but implementing a justice oriented curriculum in a systematic way risks losing the meaningfulness of the practice, unless it can be made both context specific, and available to a wider cross-section of students.

Methods

Study

In order to understand how large scale, nationally organized, professional development is provided for progressive educators, this study explores the case of the 2015 PEN National Conference. I chose this conference through theoretical sampling. PEN is the largest organization of progressive educators in the United States, and can trace its roots back to the founders of the progressive education movement in this country. Its conferences are marketed to attract teachers, as opposed to administrators or academics. A main component of PEN’s mission is for progressive educators to “play an active role in guiding the educational vision of our society” (progressiveeducationnetwork.org, ND). Since 2005, PEN’s all-volunteer committee of conference coordinators has organized biennial national meetings to provide professional

development in a way that allows participants to share informative, useful educational strategies, while being mindful of the problematic nature of promising generic solutions and ‘best practices.’

Given the complex history of progressive education theory, the contested nature of implementing a comprehensive, justice-oriented pedagogy, and the calls for more rigorous empirical studies of teacher professional development, this study explores the manner in which PEN provided professional development for its constituents. Specifically, I answer the following research question: In what ways did the professional development provided through the 2015 PEN National Conference demonstrate how progressive educators conceptualize social justice issues?

The answers to this question came from a qualitative content and discourse analysis of the workshop abstracts included in the conference program. I accessed the conference program through the PEN website at the time of registration (<http://www.progressiveeducationnetwork.org/events-2/events-archive/>, ND). At that time, a supplemental .pdf that included workshop abstracts was also available on the events webpage.

Content Analysis

For this study, content analysis is understood as, “the intellectual process of categorizing qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes” (Julien, 2008, p. 121). This thematic analysis of the workshop abstracts was based on the extant literature explained above about the justice-oriented aim of progressive educators. The conference theme *Access, Equity, and Activism: Teaching the Possible!* resonated with Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) definition of a justice-oriented curriculum as one that fosters an ability to critically assess social situations and structures to explore underlying causes to inequality and work to redress them in a democratic fashion. Therefore, my first step in analyzing the conference program was to use the conference themes as a priori codes, or codes that are already in existence, not generated from within the data (Saldaña, 2013). In the electronic .pdf of the conference program that included workshop abstracts, I used the *find* function to locate all instances of the words: *access*, *equity* and *activism*. I created a separate document for each of the three key terms. For each occurrence of the word *access*, I copied the entire abstract into the *access* document; for each occurrence of *equity*, I copied the abstract into the *equity* document; and I did the same for each occurrence of *activism*. In this way, I reorganized the conference program into three separate documents – one document for each theme. When an abstract used more than one of the three terms, I copied it into all of the relevant documents. For example, if an abstract used both *access* and *equity*, I copied the whole abstract into both the *access* document and the *equity* document. In total there were 120 workshops. Of those, 26 used the word *access*, 32 used the word *equity* and 25 used *activism*. A total of 74 out of the 120 workshops mentioned at least one of the conference theme words in either their title or their abstract.

Discourse Analysis

After separating the conference abstracts out thematically, I conducted a discourse analysis of each document and then of the documents as a whole. My aim in this analysis was to understand the “social practice” of professional development that is designed to infuse access, equity, and

activism into progressive pedagogy. In this analysis, the conference abstracts served as the discourse between those providing professional development and those seeking to access it. According to Fairclough (2002), the relationship between discourse and social practice is dialectical, in that social practice is a form of discourse, while discourse shapes the social practices of a group. Furthermore, Fairclough (2002) argues that, “social events are causally shaped by (networks of) social practices - social practices define particular ways of acting, and although actual events may more or less diverge from these definitions and expectations, they are still partly shaped by them” (p. 25). I uncovered the social practices of the conference workshops by analyzing the abstracts to understand: the *discourses*, or ways in which progressive educators represent issues of social justice; the *genre*, or the actions progressive educators are to take to combat inequity in education; and the *styles* of progressive educators, or the attitudes that progressive educators are to take up as they address issues of social justice in their schools and with their students (Fairclough, 2002). This analytic strategy is in line with the research on teacher professional development. Much of that work operates within a situative framework that conceptualizes teacher learning as rooted in “socially organized activities and individuals' use of knowledge as an aspect of their participation in social practices... learning has both individual and sociocultural features, and ...characterize(s) the learning process as one of enculturation and construction” (Borko, 2004, p. 4). In this framework, the abstracts are evidence of a professional development curriculum.

Findings

As a result of the initial a priori coding of the workshop I organized the data into three separate documents to reflect the conference themes: access, equity and activism. I read through each document separately and used “open coding” to identify and label the context in which the workshop presenter operationalized the key conference theme in the abstract (Saldaña, 2013). In this initial round of coding, I delineated between 20-25 codes, or separate ways in which the conference presenters operationalized each term (access, equity, and activism). In the second round of more focused open coding, I read through the initial codes to look for codes that were similar and that could be combined (Saldaña, 2013). After analyzing each document separately, I compared the codes for each of the categories to one another to look for overlapping codes. That process yielded three separate, thematic codes (Franzosi, 2004). Those themes were:

- (1) *Utilizing pedagogy*, which included teaching techniques for student engagement and learning objectives for the participants to be able to take an idea back to their own context;
- (2) *Reframing social issues*, which encouraged the participants to understand how social issues are commonly framed, then analyze how these issues could be experienced or perceived by others. These sessions highlighted the importance of perspective, historical significance, and societal or political structures that perpetuate inequality;
- (3) *Understanding diverse perspectives*, which delineated specific causes or groups of people for whom sessions aimed to raise awareness. The causes most commonly advocated for were: the environment, LGBT/ gender/ sexuality issues, disability, community issues, and issues of race and culture.

These themes will be further explicated and implications for their repeated use within the program will be analyzed in the following sections.

Utilizing Pedagogy

The theme of *utilizing pedagogy* encompasses three sub themes: 1) workshops that state specific aims to share teaching methodologies with participants; 2) workshops that share strategies to engage students in curriculum; and 3) workshops that provide time for participants to consider how to employ the workshop content in their own context. Examples of workshop abstracts that exemplify the utilizing pedagogy theme are:

- “Participants will consider activities, such as problem-solving puppet shows, that may inspire a spirit of social activism in their [preschool] students and will have the opportunity to create a ‘plan for engagement’ by identifying one social justice issue relevant to their school/classroom”
- “This workshop will provide you with a framework to bring hands-on citizen science into your classroom and school community”
- “ Participants will consider ideas for how to increase engagement and relevance within their content studies, ways of leading students to connect more fully with themes of equity and activism, and methods for adapting heavy, serious material for an elementary-age audience”

These representative examples show how session abstracts highlight the goal of providing participants with concrete, hands-on approaches that had been successful in the presenters’ own contexts and could be adapted to fit other contexts. The sessions are designed to provide time and space for participants to understand the practices in their original contexts, explore their transferability to other environments, and begin to work through the process of adapting practices to be relevant in each participant’s unique school and classroom.

Sessions that explicitly state the outcome of sharing teaching methodologies are directly related to the PEN principle of providing professional development to guide a progressive educational vision. Teachers who share the successes and struggles they have in their classrooms encourage other teachers to critically assess their own practices while imagining new possibilities for their own classrooms. This open dialogue between teachers from different backgrounds and contexts serves to promote Little and Ellison’s (2015) call for progressive educators to come together to understand commonalities between their situations in order to share success stories with a more common progressive voice. Also, by engaging in analytical discussions of pedagogy, conference attendees interact with teachers from diverse backgrounds to inform, and perhaps transform their teaching (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Nager & Shapiro, 2007). Workshops designed to generate pedagogical discussions among participants also serve to address the concern of providing a standardized, overarching pedagogy of professional development to progressive schools and educators. By allowing educators to engage in an analysis of their own practices and compare and contrast them to the practices of others, conference participants can self select what aspects of the workshops are most applicable to their context, allowing them to consider justice-oriented pedagogy in the context of their own students.

Reframing

Reframing explains workshops whose abstracts addressed how problematic issues in education are commonly understood and discussed. These workshop presenters asked participants to imagine what the educational implications would be if common assumptions were

to be questioned or examined from different perspectives. Reframing workshops highlight the importance of perspective, as well as the historical foundations for dominant narratives. They ask participants to examine the societal and political structures that perpetuate inequality. Examples of abstracts that utilize reframing are:

- “Participants will be asked to interrogate the impact of class, race, and culture on Harlem since the turn of the century to now, and consider how these contribute to a thesis about equity and justice for communities of color nationwide”
- “Disability, when viewed as a natural form of human variation, challenges society to examine how widespread beliefs continue to marginalize individuals”
- “The goal of this workshop is to involve participants in some deep and courageous thinking about progressive education and about how progressive we are, in fact, being in our schools”

These workshops encourage participants to adopt a lens of “transformative intellectualism,” which Giroux and McLaren (1986) explain is one that enables teachers to “reclaim space in schools for the exercise of critical citizenship via an ethical and political discourse that recasts, in emancipatory terms, the relationship between authority and teacher work, and schooling and the social order” (p. 213). Through this lens, participants contend the politics of knowledge by examining biases inherent in education as an institution, and the personal biases they themselves hold. Once educators realize their own standpoint, they can see it as historically and culturally situated within a larger systemic matrix. When participants are able to have an open, judgment free conversation about biases, they can more critically view their teaching practice and how their diverse students and families may interpret it. Conference workshops that pushed a reframing agenda recognized this and provided support for participants to understand inequity and injustice as located within a societal context, as well as an individual context. Just as Counts (1932) urged progressive educators to do over 80 years ago, the reframing workshops sought to ameliorate the gap between the needs of the individuals and the needs of the school community.

Diverse Perspectives

Stemming from the theme of reframing is the idea that in order to imagine innovative solutions to systemic problems, one must first be able to see the problem from a different perspective. In order to promote justice-oriented curriculum, teachers must be open to honoring the various ways their students experience social issues. Examples of workshops that encouraged this are:

- “Participants will dive into diverse genders and sexualities as experiential sites of possibility for teaching”
- “This workshop will invite participants to share stories and strategies of activism rooted in relationships between schools and community organizations”
- “In our workshop, participants will see how intergenerational programming promotes equity by cultivating reciprocal relationships between the young and the old, where both generations’ voices are heard”
- “We will share stories, strategies, and resources for participants to use in their school settings that provide access to families and promote equity for all”

Dewey was a proponent of diverse schools as far back as 1916, when he wrote, “the intermingling in the school of youth of different races, different religions, and unlike customs creates for all a new and broader environment (1916/2008, p. 21). This intermingling has been

linked to positive social and educational influence on individuals, particularly when students interact and socialize informally with individuals from different racial and cultural backgrounds, (Chang, 2002) and more so when they are actively engaged in critical discussions (Gurin, Dey, Gurin, & Hurtado, 2003). Even if students are not engaged in critical dialogue, studies show that the more diverse that small groups in classes can be, the more complex and novel ideas they will generate (Antonio et al., 2004). This effect is amplified if students have a diverse set of friends outside of class (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011). Furthermore, informal relationships with diverse peers are shown to have a positive impact on cognitive growth (Gurin, Dey, Gurin, & Hurtado, 2002) as well as an increased sense of comfort when working with people of different racial backgrounds (Kurlaendar & Yun, 2007).

The workshops that encouraged participants to acknowledge and honor the value of diverse perspectives employed what Ladson-Billings (1995) calls, “culturally relevant pedagogy.” A hallmark of this pedagogy is engaging students in learning for democracy and justice (Nagda, 2003). Integrative activities that challenge students’ embedded worldviews have been shown to encourage them to apply theoretical knowledge learned in classroom settings to solutions for social problems (Hurtado & DeAngelo, 2012).

Discussion

Implications for Addressing Inequity in Progressive Pedagogy

Through a discourse analysis of the workshop abstracts provided for the 2015 PEN National Conference, I uncovered the social practices that the progressive educators and presenters in attendance used to conceptualize issues of social justice. Operating from the theoretical framework provided by Fairclough, (2002) I analyzed the program for discourses, genres, and styles. The key *discourses*, or ways in which they represented issues of social justice encompassed a deliberate attempt to recognize diverse perspectives and shift the thinking of participants to consider how social issues are understood by students of color, students with different learning and physical abilities, and LGBT students. The *genre*, or the actions progressive educators must take to combat inequity in education include paying attention to the historical significance and societal or political structures that perpetuate inequality. An additional consideration that was addressed was to provide techniques that progressive schools that do not cater to a diverse body of students can do to broaden the reach of their impact. Finally, the *styles*, or the attitudes that progressive educators are to take up as they address issues of social justice in their schools and with their students, that were espoused by the conference workshop abstracts encouraged schools and teachers to generate an atmosphere of trust, a belief in the positive intent of others, and a commitment to helping students become self-advocates for their own learning needs. Together, this analysis fulfills Little and Ellison’s (2015) call for further research on progressive education in order to “move our highly effective strategies into the mainstream, where they belong” (p. 50).

Implications for Teacher Professional Development

To advance more empirically valid methods for studying teacher professional development, Desimone (2009) developed a framework for measuring the effectiveness of professional development. This framework proposes that effective professional development can be judged on

four criteria: “a) content focus, b) active learning, c) coherence, d) duration, and e) collective participation” (Desimone, 2009, p. 183). Workshops that fell under the utilizing pedagogy theme shared teaching methodologies, student and engagement strategies with participants. These types of workshops had a content focus, meaning that they linked the activities to specific subject matter and to student learning. Workshops that provided time for participants to consider how to employ the workshop content in their own context encouraged active learning and collective participation. Because PEN states that one of their aims is to guide progressive educators to expand the reach of progressive pedagogy, all of the workshops aligned with Little and Ellison’s definition of progressive education. This ensured that the conference was coherent, or in line with the teaching philosophy of its organizers, its presenters, and presumably its attendees. Finally, Desimone’s (2009) framework finds that the most effective professional development for teachers requires at least 20 hours or more of contact. The conference lasted two and a half days, so it meets this criterion, as well.

If conference attendees did walk away with an understanding of themes explained here, and they follow the PEN principle of being an educational leader by sharing their progressive model with others, it will be a formidable step in bridging the rift between child-centered progressive philosophy and justice-oriented progressive philosophy. Through participation in the professional development provided through the 2015 PEN National Conference, progressive educators encountered a basic toolkit of critical awareness that can help them to teach the possible to each and every child.

References

- Antonio, A., Chang, M., Hakuta, K., Kenny, D., Levin, S., & Milem, J. (2004). Effects of racial diversity on complex thinking in college students. *Psychological Science, 15*(8), 507-510.
- Ball, D., & Cohen, D. (1999). Developing practice, developing practitioners: Toward a practice-based theory of professional education. In G. Sykes and L. Darling-Hammond (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook for policy and practice* (pp. 3-32). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher, 33*(3), 3-15.
- Bowers, C. (1964). The social frontier journal: A historical sketch. *History of Education Society, 4*(3), 167-180.
- Bruce, B. & Eryaman, M. (2015). Introduction: The progressive impulse in education. In M. Eryaman & B. Bruce (Eds.), *International handbook of progressive education*. New York, NY: Peter Lang
- Chang, M. (2002). Preservation or transformation: Where's the real educational discourse on diversity? *The Review of Higher Education, 25*(2), 125-140.
- Counts, G. (1932). Dare progressive education be progressive? *Progressive Education, 9*(4), 257-263.
- Cremin, L. (1961). *The transformation of the school: Progressivism in American education, 1876-1957*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Davies, K. Tropp, L., Aron, A., Pettigrew, T., Wright, S. (2011). Cross-group friendships and intergroup attitudes: A meta-analytic review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 15*(4), 332-351.
- Desimone, L. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational Researcher, 38*(3), 181-199.
- Dewey, J. (1916/ 2008). *Democracy and education, an educational classic*. Radford, VA: Wilder Publications.
- EdBuild. (2016). *Fault lines: America's most segregating school district borders*. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/edbuild-public-data/data/fault+lines/EdBuild-Fault-Lines-2016.pdf>
- Fairclough, N. (2002). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. New York: Routledge.
- Franzosi, R. (2004). Content analysis. In M. Hardy & A. Bryman (Eds.), *Handbook of data analysis* (pp. 548-566). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Giroux, H. & McLaren, P. (1986). Teacher education and the politics of engagement: The case for democratic schooling. *Harvard Educational Review, 56*(3), 213-238.
- Gurin, P., Dey, E., Gurin, G., Hurtado, S. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Education Review, 72*(3), 330-366.

- Gurin, P., Dey, E., Gurin, G., Hurtado, S. (2003). How does racial/ethnic diversity promote education? *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 27(1), 20 - 29.
- Julien, H. (2008). Content Analysis. In L. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 121-123). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Kliebard, H. (1995). *The struggle for the American curriculum 1893 - 1958* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Kohn, A. (2008). Education Progressive. *Independent School*, 67(3), 18-30.
- Kurlaender, M. & Yun, J. (2007). Measuring school racial composition and student outcomes in a multiracial society. *American Journal of Education*, 111(2), 213-242.
- Labaree, D. (2005). Progressivism, schools and schools of education: An American romance. *Paedagogica Historica*, 41(1 & 2), 275-288.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 159-165.
- Little, T. & Ellison, K. (2015). *Loving learning: How progressive education can save America's schools* New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Milner, R. (2012). *Start where you are, but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nagda, B. (2003). Transformative pedagogy for democracy and social justice. *Race, ethnicity, and education*, 6(2), 165-191.
- Nager, N. & Shapiro, E. (2007). A progressive approach to the education of teachers: Some principles from Bank Street College of Education. *Bank Street College of Education Occasional Paper Series*, 18, 3-44.
- Progressive Education Network. (2017). Progressive Education Network. Retrieved from <http://www.progressiveeducationnetwork.org>
- Read, S. (2013). The educators and the curriculum: Stories of progressive education in the 21st century. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 9(3), 107-123.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Thinnes, C. (2015). Progressive education has a race problem (Part 1). Retrieved from <http://chris.thinnes.me/?p=2480>
- Welner, K. & Carter, P. (2013). Achievement gaps arise from opportunity gaps. In K. P. Carter & Welner (Eds.), *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance* (pp. 1-10). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Education Research Association*, 41(2), 237-260.
- Wilson, S. & Berne, J. (1999). Chapter 6: Teacher learning and the acquisition of professional knowledge: An examination of research on contemporary professional development. *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 173-209.